

EAST HARWICH VISION STATEMENTS

Board of Selectmen
East Harwich Subcommittee
March 6, 2013

1. Current zoning and the development that it leads to should be changed.
2. Appropriate commercial development is a priority and should take place in a pedestrian-friendly and interconnected pattern.
3. A strong residential component should be included.
4. The town should provide active direction in pursuit of its vision.
5. Growth levels should be reasonable, and growth patterns should be managed.
6. The town's vision should include an element of "offset" zoning for outlying districts in the East Harwich area.
7. East Harwich zoning should be considered in the context of other principal villages in Harwich.
8. The East Harwich vision should be integrated with Harwich wastewater planning.

Each of the above statements is described further on the following pages.

1. Current zoning and the development that it leads to should be changed.

Development based on current zoning consists of buildings and parking lots on individual parcels with little connection to each other. If commercial patrons wish to visit more than one location, they must park in one parking lot and then drive to another. There is little encouragement of pedestrian travel between uses and little desire to spend more time than needed to complete one's business. The existing pattern, while commercially viable, could be greatly improved to create an enjoyable place to do business.

It is insufficient to "do nothing" with existing zoning in East Harwich.

2. Appropriate commercial development is a priority and should take place in a pedestrian-friendly and interconnected pattern.

East Harwich is the largest consolidated commercial district in Harwich. It serves users from East Harwich, the balance of Harwich, and the neighboring towns of Chatham, Brewster and Orleans. It is one of the most appropriate locations in Harwich for additional commercial development.

Commercial development should take place in a pedestrian-friendly and interconnected pattern. A strong retail component is an essential feature, but uses also should include professional and medical offices, restaurants, and other commercial, educational and cultural establishments. The mix of uses should complement each other and provide a "sense of place".

Not all commercial uses are appropriate for East Harwich. Notably, establishment of big box auto dependent retail should be strongly discouraged as out of scale and character for this location.

The village street pattern is the strongest expression of interconnected pedestrian-friendly development and should be provided in a central location. Other forms of interconnected development may be suitable in other portions of the district.

3. A strong residential component should be included.

Mixed-use development, including a residential component, helps create more of a "sense of place" than a stand-alone commercial district. Residential users create an immediate market for restaurants, personal services and retail goods. Their presence adds to the day and evening vitality of the district.

A key element is location of residences within easy walking distance of the district. Residential options include second and/or third story residences above commercial, residential-only buildings within the mixed-use district, and residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the mixed-use district.

4. The town should provide active direction in pursuit of its vision.

The town's role is to create a blueprint for new development. Actual development is the responsibility of landowners and developers. The town's blueprint must acknowledge market forces and must provide fair development opportunities. However, such factors should be considered within the framework of the town's vision. Once a vision is determined, the town should devote all of its tools – infrastructure funding (sewers, road improvements, etc.), zoning regulations, and land acquisition and management – towards accomplishing that vision.

Zoning regulations may include dimensional limits (lot coverage, building height, etc.), design standards (building appearance, siting of buildings and parking lots, etc.) and location of uses. Zoning regulations may also provide guidance for new streets and other critical organizing elements for development of the district. Zoning regulations should provide bonuses for achieving the town's vision while maintaining a reasonable level of growth.

While zoning plays a key role in achieving the vision, it should not be overly rigid. Some variation will occur in use characteristics and site location within the overall district. Zoning should allow some level of flexibility while continuing to support the vision.

5. Growth levels should be reasonable and growth patterns should be managed.

The Town's goal should not be to stop growth. Instead it should determine reasonable growth targets. Additionally, growth patterns should be shaped to accomplish concentrated growth in specified districts and to limit growth in environmentally-sensitive locations.

6. The town's vision should include an element of "offset" zoning for outlying districts in the East Harwich area.

Harwich zoning currently sets forth commercial and industrial districts, high-density residential districts, and a large rural residential zoning district. While development is encouraged in some existing locations, it is limited in others. It is reasonable to consider further limits in outlying districts as an offset to greater development opportunities in the current East Harwich commercial district.

The offset area should be specific to East Harwich. A logical boundary is the Pleasant Bay watershed for two reasons. First, the current East Harwich commercial district is centrally located within the watershed. Second, this watershed is treated as a unified component of the town's wastewater planning.

The portion of the Six Ponds DCPC outside the Pleasant Bay watershed should be removed from the boundaries of the offset area. This does not reduce the importance of planning for rural development and protection of environmental resources in this area. However, such planning should be done in a town-wide context.

Within the offset area, attention must first be given to environmental impacts. Clear information should be made available on the health of ponds, bays and aquifers in the East

Harwich area and any anticipated changes from construction of a municipal wastewater treatment system. Other environmental considerations are protection of:

- potential well areas
- open space
- natural resources. e.g., rare plant and wildlife habitat
- wetlands
- character of area and cultural landscape

The form of offset, whether accomplished by zoning or other means, needs more work. Alternatives to be considered include:

- A variation of the proposed Natural Resource Protection (NRP) District with reconsideration of base zoning density and type of density bonuses, or
- Stronger clustering provisions including a natural resource analysis similar to the NRP proposal (without the reduced density and bonus components of NRP), or
- Emphasis on additional public acquisition of land in the offset area rather than reliance on zoning, and
- Use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as a supplemental approach (but not sole reliance on TDR due to its modest success elsewhere).

7. East Harwich zoning should be considered in the context of other principal villages in Harwich.

The Local Comprehensive Plan discusses growth opportunities for each of the three principal villages – East Harwich, Harwich Center and Harwich Port. This plan should serve as a template for discussion of growth in commercial and mixed-use development in the entire town.

8. The East Harwich vision should be integrated with Harwich wastewater planning.

The East Harwich vision should be integrated with the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan to support desired growth in specified areas while ensuring environmental protections throughout the Pleasant Bay watershed. This integration is an iterative process beginning with the vision and then costing it against required wastewater infrastructure requirements. If deemed too expensive, less expensive options should be identified and again compared to the vision.